

La Bienvenue

"I am embarrassed not to know Buenos Aires
and New York; I'd like to walk at will
through London streets and talk with
everyone I want, even in Broken English."

-- Prologue, Yevgeny Yevtushenko

Welcome, Yevtushenko, to my country.

Speak to us in your Broken English
As you walk the streets of New York;
I'll eavesdrop each word you sing
Into my pocket ... Steinbeck
Is not our god. We, too, have no god,
But The Word. The Word and the Song.
Sing to us in a foreign tongue
And we will listen with native ear.

History teaches us
Of the past insurrections on your steppes.
We also have trouble with our steps.
The chancellor does not like what we say
On our steps. We, too, are being banned.
Our Love Books seized. Have you wondered
How far it is from the steppes of the Urals
To the Steps of freedom? The mind knows
The secrets of the heart. Come,
Telegraph with us. We'll disturb all home
Lands. Ours is already Living Hell.

Welcome, Yevtushenko, to my country.
You have come a long way to share it with us,
You, Zhenya, a stranger on borrowed soil.

Nov. 4, 1966, after
hearing Y.Y. read at
Univ. of Calif., Berkeley.